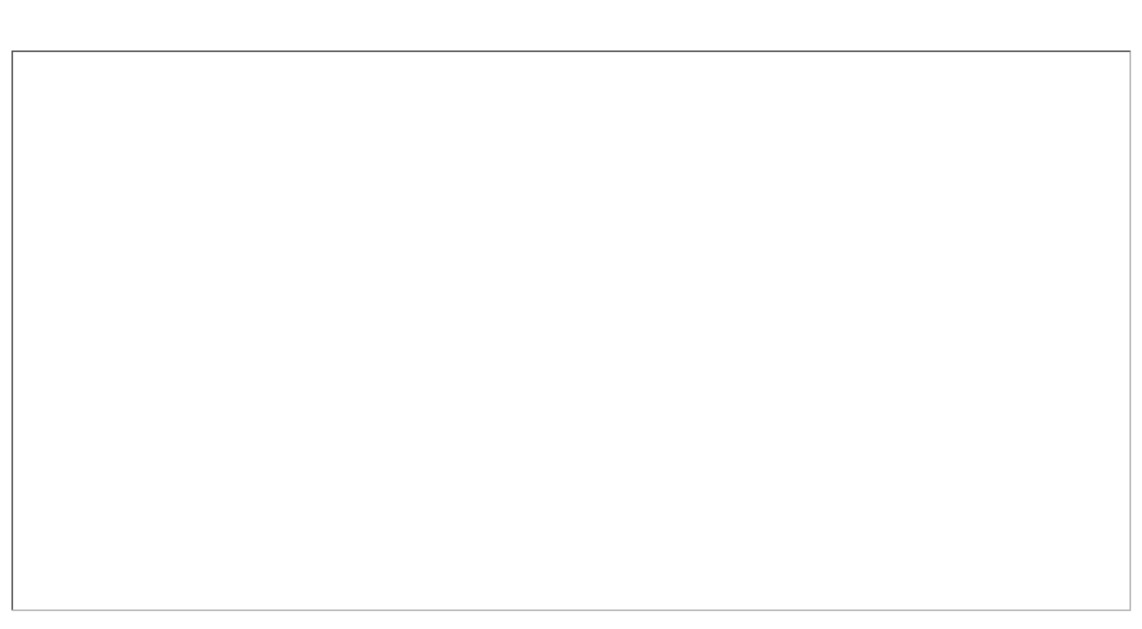






GITTE DU PLESSIS 2018-08-18

ENJOY YOUR VACATION!

BIOPOLITICS ŽIŽEK, BUDDHISM, FESTISH, MOBILITY, TOURISM, VACATION

CONCLUSION: VACATION AS FETISH

To Žižek, a fetish is an 'embodiment of the Lie which enables us to sustain the unbearable truth' (Žižek, 2001b: 13). The subject 'rationally' accepts the truth, yet is only able to do so because she or he has their fetish to cling to, and the subject's acceptance of the way things are will dissolve if the fetish is taken away. So, Žižek says, when anyone asserts to be cured of any beliefs and claims to accept social reality the way it is, one should always ask 'OK, but *where is the fetish which enables you to (pretend to) accept reality "the way it is*?"' (Žižek, 2001b: 15). As an example of such a fetish, Žižek describes what he calls 'Western Buddhism', a type of spiritualism that is also advocated in *Eat, pray, love*:

> Instead of trying to cope with the accelerating rhythm of technological progress and social change, one should rather renounce the very endeavour to retain control over what goes on, rejecting it as the expression of the modern logic of domination – one should, instead, "let oneself go," drift along, while retaining an inner distance and indifference towards the mad dance of this accelerated process, a distance based on the insight that all the social and technological upheaval is ultimately just an unsubstantial proliferation of semblances which do not really concern the innermost kernel of our being. (Žižek, 2001b: 13)

I will add that the vacation fantasy is also such a fetish, in that it enables the subject to accept the reality of a whole year (minus three weeks) of work. If this little nugget of mobile 'freedom' was removed from the workers, they would be confronted with the reality that they are first and foremost wage-earners. In relation to neoliberal work practices, Žižek posits 'Western Buddhism' as 'establishing itself as the hegemonic ideology of global capitalism':

Although "Western Buddhism" presents itself as a remedy against the stressful tension of the capitalist dynamics, allowing us to uncouple and retain inner peace and *Gelassenheit,* it actually functions as its perfect ideological supplement. (Žižek, 2001b: 12)

In the same way, the vacation fantasy becomes an ideological supplement for capitalist modes of work. The mobility that is practiced when workers travel away for vacation is a mobility that in essence functions to fix workers in their role as workers. 'Excessive attachment to the part means that the fetishist "misses the bigger picture"' (Taylor, 2014: 93). Vacations thus function to

make the workers more comfortable with (or, accepting of) their own alienation, and by doing so keeps the workers libidinally invested in their work. As such, the main gap of social reality that the vacation fantasy offers a veil for is the worker's alienation. Coupled with the neoliberal claim that it is a personal responsibility and a moral obligation of the individual to be happy and fulfilled, the vacation fantasy can keep us all tightly invested in the status quo. This makes the vacation fantasy the sugar-coating that enables the subject to swallow the (immobile) reality of work life, year after year.

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